

CHAPTER THREE (3)

GSP

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NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT & ECONOMIC



NATIONALISM AND INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

The Socio-political Origin of Nigerian Nationalism (1945 - 1960)
Nigerian Colonial Constitutional Development
Pressure Groups and Party Formation
The Politics of Decolonization

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CHAPTER (3)

NATIONALISM AND INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines and explains the origins and dimensions of the nationalist struggles in Nigeria, which led to the granting of independence in 1960. The chapter also explains the constitutional changes, which greatly accelerated the pace of the nationalist agitation. It concludes with the contributions of pressure groups in this process as well as the factors that conditioned the emergence of political parties in Nigeria, with a final section on the politics of Decolonization.

2. THE SOCIO-POLITICAL ORIGIN OF NIGERIAN NATIONALISM (1945 - 1960)

Nationalism in Nigeria pre-dated the establishment of effective British control over the territory known as Nigeria. Nationalism is considered as the manifestation of people's desire to promote and protect the integrity of their nation. It is seen as the struggle for freedom and self-determination from external domination. It is therefore the consciousness on the part of the people and a

reaction against foreign control, in order for the people to control their destiny in their own hands. Even before the amalgamation of 1914, nationalists' tendencies manifested itself in Nigeria. It is for this reason, that some scholars categorized nationalism into two broad divisions. There is what referred to as *resistant movements* or *traditional nationalism*, which was strongly expressed by the various organized communities against colonial invasion. In fact, resistant movements were the early efforts of the Africans, mostly organized under their local leaders to resist the imposition of European rule over them, particularly at the early days of colonialism. This resulted in many violent clashes of these resistant movements are what came to be referred to in some academic circles as the colonial wars (Ikeme, 1977) clearly demonstrated these clashes in the various Nigerian communities before their eventual conquest by the British forces. These resistant movements were humiliated and defeated by the British forces, largely because of the possession of superior weapons and their diplomatic skills. However, they set the stage for future opposition to colonial rule. In fact, the refusal of some of this leader to succumb to the European machinations led to the forceful exile of people like the **Jaja of Opobo** and **Nana of Itsekiri Land**. Others like **Sultan Attahiru of Sokoto** was killed in the battle of **Burmi in 1903** (Ikemi: 1977; 198-209).

The second form of nationalism is called *modern nationalism* because it was essentially spear headed by the educated elite,

when colonial rule became firmly entrenched in Nigeria. It was the resistance of Nigerians against colonial oppression and domination. There are both internal and external factors responsible for nationalist struggle in Nigeria. But, the internal factors are more apparent in motivating Nigerians towards nationalist agitation. Colonialism wills all its oppressive imprints greatly undermined the lives of virtually all Nigerians. In essence, British rule carried with it racial intolerance and discrimination. And as Olusanya (1980) rightly contends, there were also limited opportunities for Nigerians in the administrative machinery, and open economic exploitation of Nigerians by foreign enterprises with the connivance of British colonial administration (1980: 546). Besides, there was also cultural subjugation whereby their cultures were seen, considered and treated as primitive and uncivilized. Consequently, all these factors affected all Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic, religious affiliations and educational attainment. Therefore, arising from this, Nigerians begin to establish organizations to mobilize the people against colonial domination. It is important to note that, one of the interesting things about the nationalist protests in Nigeria revolves around the emerging urban educated elites who vehemently opposed colonial policies and programmes, even though there were reported cases of collaboration with the colonial authorities. Another peculiarity dissemble in the nationalist in the nationalist movement was the predominance of Southerners at the onset as leaders of the movement (Olusanya: 1980: 546). Of course, their colleagues from the north later joined them.

Similarly, some of the nationalist that participated in the agitation only fought for increased recognized from the colonial authorities and improvement in their official privileges as colonial civil servants. What seem to have influenced and accelerated in the nationalists' ferment in Nigeria includes the emergence of political associations and parties like **Nigerian Youth Movement** and **Nigerian National Democratic Party**, which led in the struggle for political representation in colonial administration. The growth of the press greatly accelerated the nationalist protests as many of the Newspapers like the *West African Pilot*, *the African Morning Post* and the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph*, all educated and aroused people's feeling against colonialism.

Similarly, the growth of trade unions and labour organizations also helped to increase the tempo of nationalist activities, as they demanded for better conditions of service for workers as well as general provision for basic facilities of life for all Nigerian. For instance, certain external influences helped to sharpen nationalist activities and America helped immensely to promote the growth of nationalism. Likewise, the contribution of some pan-African personalities such **W.E.B. Dubois**, **Marcus Garvey** and **Sylvester Williams** and their Negro associations like **Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association** greatly simulated the need for independence and freedom for colonial territories. Again, the impact of the Second World War was very relevant in further understanding the nationalist protests in Nigeria. In fact, Olusanya (1980) succinctly argues that the war had a great impact on the

development of political consciousness and therefore on the nationalist movement in Nigeria. He urges thus:

“Thus war itself, according to the allied propaganda was waged to preserve democracy, which could not exist in colonial situation. Secondly, the war greatly undermined the foundation of colonial empires. It also weakened colonial powers economically and thereby militarily and therefore undermined the strongest weapons for the maintenance of colonial territories” (Olusanya: 1980; 560).

This in effect was largely responsible for marked changes in the pattern of struggles more especially with the return of the ex-service men who saw it all and therefore urged their people to stand for equal justice and freedom.

In the final analysis, nationalist activities in Nigeria helped to accelerate political and constitutional changes in the whole of the British West Africa. It also generated political awareness and consciousness, which mobilized and united the people against colonial domination. And it helped to modify colonial policies, which minimally introduced better opportunities for Nigeria in the colonial administrative machinery and finally ushered in the independence of Nigeria in 1960.

3. NIGERIAN COLONIAL CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Formal constitutional process of development in Nigeria took root with the amalgamation of Nigeria by Lord Lugard in 1914. Although Lord Lugard did not establish any constitutional

instrument for administering Nigeria, he did set up the Lugard council, which essentially served as a deliberative and advisory council of Nigeria, with large composition of traditional rulers and white representatives. The council was not legislative as such because it was not effectively involved in formulating laws for the colony. Therefore, Lord Lugard succeeded in arrogating to himself enormous powers without any consideration for the multiethnic composition of the various Nigerian nationalists.

Following the inability of the Lugard council to respond to the legislative aspirations of all Nigerians and with the exit of Lord Lugard in **1918**, a new constitution emerged in **1922**, known as the **Clifford Constitution**. The constitution introduced some changes in the administration of Nigeria, which provided for elected Nigerian membership into the council and therefore became the law making body and not the Governor, as was previously the case under Lugard (Lasisi, et al; 1999: 48).

Similarly, the **Clifford constitution** retained some of the structures of the Lugard administration such as provincial system and the restriction of the membership to the coastal areas at the onset. This in effect was one of the major defects identified in the Clifford constitution. And with increased awareness on the part of Nigerians for political changes, memoranda was prepared incorporating new changes and submitted to the legislative council for deliberations.

The changes were proposed by then colonial Governor, **Sir Bernard Bourdillon**, but the new constitution took effect in **1946** under **Sir Arthur Richard**. The Richard's constitution

introduced far-reaching changes than the Clifford constitution. For instance, the Richard's constitution divided the country into three separate regions with legislative and executive councils. In the **West and East unicameral legislative house** was established in the **North a bicameral system** was adopted, i.e. a *house of chiefs* and the *house of assembly*. Again, the regionalization of the country helped to facilitate regional politics with the emergence of parties along regional lines and of course, there was strong concentration of power at the centre. A few years after introduction of the Richard's constitution, **Governor Richard** retired from the services of the colonial government and was replaced by **John MacPherson** as the new colonial Governor of Nigeria. With growing criticisms of the Richard's constitution particularly with the lack of consultation with Nigerians and the disproportionate membership in favour of the Europeans representatives. **Governor John MacPherson** set the machinery for the review of the constitution. One interesting thing about MacPherson constitution was that for the first time the process of constitution making generally involved all Nigerians.

To this end, constitutional conferences were organized in all the regions to deliberate on the new constitution and eventually the **MacPherson constitution** came into effect in **1951**. The MacPherson's constitution retained most of the provisions of the Richard's constitution; the only additional introduction in the new constitution was the establishment of a House of Representative at the centre to replace the old legislative

council. Similarly, the constitution further entrenched regionalism by making provision for the regionalization of the public services, the police and other extra-ministerial departments. But internal wrangling and political mud-slinging among and between the parties and political actors led to a renewed call for a review of the **1951 MacPherson constitution**. In fact, the **Kano riot of 1953** was considered as the immediate factor that led to the **1953-54 constitutional deliberations** under **Sir Oliver Lyttleto**, which ushered in the **Lyttleton constitution in 1954**. It was under **1954 Lyttleton constitution** that federalism was eventually adopted as a constitutional arrangement for the unity of Nigeria as a Multi-ethnic society. The constitution fell short of providing a basis for a true federalism, because as Awolowo noted, the constitution was a **“Wretched compromise between federalism and Unitarianism”**. However, it was a landmark in the history of constitution making in Nigeria. It provided the basis for the constitution of independent Nigeria (Olusanya, 1980: 539) and affected the complete regionalization of the Marketing Boards as well as Nigerian Judiciary. To comply with the demand for regional autonomy, provisions were also made for the Regional Premiers, who in effect were leaders of the regional governments and political parties. Thus, **Sir. Ahmadu Bello** became the **premier of the North**, **Chief Awolow** of the **West** and **Dr. Nnamdi Azikwer** for the **East**. It is significant to observe that with each new constitution during the colonial period, fresh demands and agitations for structural

changes always emerged. As a result, the Lyttleton constitution was criticized for its inability discussions was set for **1956** and **1957** in London which popularly came to be referred to as the **Lancaster House Conference**. The outcome of the deliberations set the target date for the final disengagement of the colonial master from Nigeria as the **1st of October, 1960**.

One of the most significant changes introduced in the 1960 constitution was the creation of the post of Prime-Minister and the appointment of a Nigerian as Governor General, in the person of **Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe**, to replace the office of the Chief Secretary. The governor-General presided over the council Ministers. Similarly, the issue of the minorities was addressed and a revenue allocation formula was also decided after adoption of recommendation of the **Raisman Commission**, which suggested the creation of a distributable pool of federally collected revenue. The distributable poll was to be shared among the regions on a percentage basis. The issue if revenue allocation has been so much a hotly contestable issue in the Nigerian federalism that, even now, no acceptable formula have been worked out in the best interest of all Nigerians.

With the **1960 constitution** in place from **October 1, 1960**, for the first time, became fully involved in managing their affairs and also set the machinery for the review of the independence constitution. The major desire on the part of Nigerians was for the attainment of a Republican status, outside the monarchical

control of imperial British. Consequently, Nigeria attained a **republican status** in **1963** with the **creation of the office of President and Commander-in-Chief**, to replace the **Governor-General**. Furthermore, many other structural changes in the parliamentary system were introduced and some of the institution already in place strengthened.

The process of constitution making in Nigeria immediately after the collapse of the first republic was essentially a military-directed process. The process has always been characterized by the establishment of a Constitution Assembly to deliberate and fashion out a new constitution for Nigerian. This happened for the **1979, 1989, 1995** and even the **1999 constitution**. These constitutional documents are mostly with certain major pitfalls given the elite composition of the commissions. There is also the strong influence of the military Juntas in directing the outcome of the process to suit their particularistic interests.

4. PRESSURE GROUPS AND PARTY FORMATION

Pressure groups and political have greatly contributed in accelerating the process of constitutional changes and nationalist activities in Nigeria. The emergence and formation of these groups had its origin from the colonial period. Some of the early pressure groups that emerged agitated for changes in some specific areas like education, health and administration. Similarly, these pressure groups later crystalized into political associations that contested for election in various regions. For instance, mostly, professional based in Lagos constituted the

Lagos Youth Movement, which started as a protest group against the establishment of a **higher college at Yaba**. In addition, these pressure groups neither sought nor received popular support and they had no concrete political and economic programmes. In fact, they were in essence sectional in outlook (Taiwo et al, 1978: 164). But the Lagos Youth Movement latter metamorphosed into the **Nigerian Youth Movement** in **1939**. Although this movement was later rocked by internal leadership wrangling, which led to its collapse, it set the pace for the formation of political associations in Colonial Nigeria. The formation of other political parties was closely associated with this development. However, the most important factor that conditioned the formation of political parties was the introduction of the **Clifford Constitution** in **1922**. Ngdu (1987) captures this very vividly, as she argues that:

“The introduction that year of the elective principle in respect of the newly inaugurated legislative council established for the Colony of Lagos and the protectorate of Southern Nigeria was the impetus for the rise of Nigeria’s first political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP)” (Ngdu, 1987: 89)

This party which was organized in Lagos under the leadership of **Dr. Herbert Macaulay** contested most of the legislative elections between **1923** and **1945**, when new parties began to emerge. The inability of the **NNDP** to transverse with all the

nooks and crannies of Nigeria led to its sudden collapse, more especially with the death of **Herbert Macaulay** in **1946**. However, prior to that **Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe**, the Secretary General, broke away to form the **National Council of Nigerians and the Cameroon (NCNC)** in **1944**. It was a conglomeration of tribal associations, trade Unions and Market women associations, but it was the first major political party that emerged with national spread and acceptance among the various sections of the Nigerian community. The growing influence of the NCNC in Nigerian politics and increased constitutional changes witnessed under the Richard and MacPherson constitutions led to the formation of more political parties in Nigeria. Around **1945**, a cultural organization known as “**Egbo Omo Odududwa**”, was founded in London by **Chief Obafemi Awolowo**. And when he eventually returned to Nigeria in **1947**, he established another Branch of this association in Ibadan. Soon the organization grew rapidly and became the focus of Pan-Yoruba solidarity. Through Awolowo’s contacts and efforts, the **Egbe Omo Oduduwa** crystallized into a political party launched in **1949** as the Action Group (Taiwo, et al. 1978: 169).

Similarly, in the North efforts were made for the formation, of a political party. Already, there was the existence of various associations, such as the **Zaria Provincial Progressive Union**, the **Bauchi Discussion Circle**, the **Kano Citizens Associations** and the **Citizens Welfare Association of Sokoto**. In **1948**, these associations came together to form two major

organizations that later in the years became one. The two groups were the **Jam’iyyar Mutanen Arewa (Northern Peoples’ Congress)** and the **Jam’iyya Mutanen Arewa (Association of Northern Peoples’ of Today)**. As a result of the initiative of **Dr. R.A. Dikoo** and **Mallam Abubakar Imam**, these two organizations merged to form **Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC)** with the objective of promoting Northern interests (Ngou, 1988: 93).

The three political parties highlighted above were the first major parties that emerged in Nigeria during the colonial period, and later dominated the Nigerian political scene. They were parties with regional and sectional outlook. It is important to observe that during the formative period in the development of parties in Nigeria, they mostly started as tribal associations with the aim of defending the sectional interest of their tribes or ethnic groups. However, the objective political conditions in the country forced many of these associations to transform into parties. For example, in **1953** notable associations like the **Tiv Progressive Union**, the **Ijumu Progressive Union** and the **Igbirra Progressive Union** merged to form **Middle Belt People Party** under **E.G. Gundu** (Ngou: 1988; 95). This party together with the Middle Zone League joined forces to form the **United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC)** in 1954, as a challenge to the “**Northern Domination**” by the NPC, since it represented the cause of the *Talakawas* who are the downtrodden and in the majority in Nigerian politics. It is important at this juncture, to contend that one of the most

interesting features of the party system prior to independence and in the First Republic was multipartism, i.e. the existence of multiple political parties. It is very accurate to argue that the Nigerian political scene was dominated by three political parties but it is equally correct to explain that a total of fifteen (15) other parties contested the critical election of **1959** which ushered in the independence government in **1960**. In addition, political contest during the colonial period and afterwards was characterized by electoral co-operation through party alliances or coalitions in order to acquire and control political power, either in the regions or at the centre.

In the final analysis, it can be rightly argued that political parties in Nigeria evolved when legislative institutions were set up and when it appeared that the colonial authorities would hand over effective control to Nigerians. Similarly, they evolved to control the centres of emergent power at the regional level since this was the level at which the colonial administration first eased up on their control (Dare, 1988: 110). Obviously, this conditioned the regional and sectional outlook of the early political parties in Nigeria.

5. THE POLITICS OF DECOLONIZATION

Decolonization literally means **a change in the status of a state from a dependent controlled and colonized entity, to an independent one with the freedom to decide and control the affairs of the state.** It is a power shift from the hands of the foreigners to the indigenous people. The process of

decolonization in Nigeria reached its climax in **1960** with the hoisting of the green-white-green flag on the **1st October**, in **Lagos**. Although some scholars are of view that Nigerian independence was won on a platter of Gold through constitutional dialogue and consultations. But, it is important to acknowledge that Nigerians made great sacrifices before independence was finally granted. The various nationalist agitation and protests were manifestation of Nigeria resistance and opposition to colonial oppressive policies. For instance, the **Aba women's riots**, the **Abeokuta women's revolt**, the **Enugu coal miner's strike** and the **general worker's strike** and many more were a stark demonstration of Nigerians opposition to economic exploitation and political subjugation. As a result, many Nigerians lost their lives in the fight against colonial repression.

It is therefore erroneous to claim that there was total absence of sustained struggles by Nigerians in the fight for the liberation of their country. Usman (1988) appropriately demonstrates that the process for the attainment of independence in Nigeria involved two distinct stages. The first period is that of the struggle for independence, when the forces of the independence movement, represented by trade Union workers, farmers, market women, labourers, artisans, drivers, students etc. were pitched in the battle against the forces of the colonizer. While on the other hand, the second stage was the period of transition to independence, mostly characterized with the constitutional conferences (1988: 9). Consequently, the first stage in the early

1930s and ended in **1947**, while the second stage lasted till the **1st October, 1960**. Within the first stage and even prior to that numerous associations of workers, artisans and traders and even tribal associations took the centre stages in the anti-colonial uprisings and riots. This reached its climax in **1945** with **fifty-two-day workers' strike** of June, led by **Micheal Imoudu** where over **42,951** workers took part (Usman, 1988: 11). In addition, these strikes, boycotts, petitions and riots were further intensified with the return of Nigerian soldiers from the battle field, after the end of the Second World War, who also sharpened and strengthened the anti-colonial and liberation struggles for independence in Nigeria. It would be perfectly correct for one to argue that these struggles were largely obscured in explaining the independence struggles in Nigeria.

Therefore, the period of the transition to independence was essentially meant to lay the constitutional framework for the final independence of Nigeria in 1960. It can be argued without any fear of contradiction that the two stages effectively ushered the decolonization from domination. It was the combination of the anti-colonial struggles of the numerous popular organizations of workers, farmers, traders, students, ex-servicemen, youths, artisans, clan and tribal Unions, transporters (Usman, 198: 10-11) etc. The constitutional discussions, which lasso accelerated the tempo of nationalist activities, effectively led to the attainment of independence by Nigerian representatives in October, 1960.